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Nicaraguan Urges U.S. to Rein In Rebels

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 3 — A leader of Nicaragua's political opposition urged today that Congress renew aid to anti-Government guerrillas, but also suggested that the United States should do a better job of controlling the rebels' behavior in the field.

The leader, Arturo José Cruz, who spoke at a news conference here, was asked about allegations that the American-backed rebels had committed atrocities against unarmed civilians. He responded by acknowledging that "tragic instances" had occurred.

But he added that the American "donors of aid also have a responsibility to demand rational behavior on the part of the recipients."

Senator Patrick J. Leahy, the Vermont Democrat, said last month that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence would investigate the allegations of rebel atrocities.

Mr. Cruz, a former Nicaraguan Ambassador to the United States, was an opposition candidate for the presidency last year. But he withdrew his candidacy, saying the Sandinistas were not permitting truly free elections.

Today he said that an informal coalition of nonmilitary opponents of the Sandinista Government met recently, but he did not describe any clear plan of action resulting from the meeting except to say that the opponents would continue fighting "for real democracy for Nicaragua."

A Willingness to Lobby

He said he would be willing to lobby in Congress in the coming weeks for the resumption of aid. Congress suspended aid to the rebels last spring but is to reconsider the question next month. Mr. Cruz said it would be "a terrible political mistake" not to renew it, unless the Soviet Union and Cuba also ended their aid to the Sandinistas.

When asked about the charges of atrocities Mr. Cruz said that the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest rebel group, had disciplined any member found guilty of abusing civilians. He said that when rebels killed unarmed civilians, it was often the fault of the Sandinistas for "lack of care."

"If there is a truck with civilians and soldiers in it," he said, "it's hard for the contras to know if it is a military or a civilian group."

Sandinistas Accused of Abuses

At the news conference, a Nicaraguan rebel official made public a compilation of dozens of abuses purportedly committed against civilians by the Sandinistas in the last year.

The official, Bosco Matamoros, the Washington representative for the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, accused the Sandinista Government of

"carrying out a policy of systematically violating the human rights of civilians."

Mr. Matamoros said various Nicaraguan citizens had told rebel leaders about the incidents described in the 11-page listing, which said that dozens of civilians who were disloyal to the Government had disappeared and that other unarmed civilians had been jailed, beaten and killed by Government security officers. The document also contended that hundreds of civilians had died as the result of attacks on villages by Sandinista soldiers.

Need for Aid Questioned

Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, the former editor of the Nicaraguan opposition newspaper La Prensa who voluntarily left the country last month, said at the news conference that he is not so sure the rebels actually need American aid.

"The U.S. cut support to the contras a long time ago, but they have continued their struggle, and have increased it," he said. "It is not proportional to U.S. aid."

Mr. Chamorro announced two weeks ago that he had moved to Costa Rica because he was weary of trying to comply with the Sandinista Government's newspaper censorship requirements.

Today he said: "The range of news items, international information, editorials and photographs covered by censorship is simply unbelievable" and "has reached a monstrous level."

He added that the files of stories that were censored "are already so volumi-

nous that, even if we had a full year at the present number of pages, La Prensa could not publish all the material that has been censored during the past three years."

He said that in one recent case, the Sandinista censors objected to the publication of a story about a 94-year-old woman who had committed suicide, charging that the story was "an attack on the psychic health of the people and, therefore, an attack against the security of the state."